DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 336 940 FL 019 361

AUTHOR Phillips, June K.; Glisan, Eileen W.
TITLE Teachers Working with Teachers: Becoming Proficient with Proficiency.
PUB DATE 88
NOTE 12p.; In: New Challenges and Opportunities. Dimension: Languages 87. Report of the Southern Conference on Language Teaching, p109-119, 1988. For the proceedings, see FL 019 352.
PUB TYPE Speeches/Conference Papers (150)

EDRS PRICE MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS *Competency Based Education; *French; Higher Education; *Inservice Teacher Education; *Language Proficiency; Language Teachers; Language Tests; Program Descriptions; Secondary Education; *Secondary School Teachers; Second Language Instruction; *Spanish; State Programs; Testing
IDENTIFIERS *ACTFL Oral Proficiency Interview; *Indiana University of Pennsylvania

ABSTRACT

A project developed at Indiana University of Pennsylvania was designed to meet the needs of secondary school teachers of French and Spanish in two areas: proficiency maintenance and improvement, and proficiency testing. The program consisted of four phases, two during the funding period and two follow-up. The first, proficiency-building, involved a series of Saturday language immersion sessions throughout the academic year. Teachers talked with each other about topics geared to strengthening their target-language proficiency. The second phase, proficiency training, occurred in a 3-week summer institute. The first part, subcontracted to the American Council for the Teaching of Foreign Languages, trained selected teachers in conducting and rating the Oral Proficiency Interview. The second part involved proficiency-oriented curriculum design and instructional strategies. During phase three, proficiency implementation, participants implemented projects developed in the summer workshop, using funds allocated for that purpose by district superintendents. Evaluation and dissemination of project results, the fourth phase, occurred informally and in a methodology conference at the university. (MSE)

**********
* Reproductions supplied by EDRS are the best that can be made *
* from the original document. *
**********

"PERMISSION TO REPRODUCE THIS MATERIAL HAS BEEN GRANTED BY

Phillips, June K.

Glisan, Eileen W.

TO THE EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)."

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION
Office of Educational Research and Improvement
EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)

☑ This document has been reproduced as received from the person or organization originating it.

☐ Minor changes have been made to improve reproduction quality.

• Points of view or opinions stated in this document do not necessarily represent official OERI position or policy.

ED336940

FL019361

9

# Teachers Working with Teachers:

## Becoming Proficient with Proficiency

**June K. Phillips**
**Tennessee Foreign Language Institute**
**Eileen W. Glisan**
**Indiana University of Pennsylvania**

For better or worse the very mention of the word "proficiency" in the profession attracts a certain interest at conferences, in articles, and in the course of informal discussion among teachers of foreign languages. Two very different aspects of proficiency concern teachers in the secondary schools: the first has to do with the maintenance and improvement of their own level of oral proficiency and the second with the means of teaching and testing for proficiency in the four skills in their classrooms.

A project developed at Indiana University of Pennsylvania under a grant from the Secretary's Discretionary Funds set as its goal meeting the needs of secondary teachers of French and Spanish in both these areas of proficiency. An underlying assumption of the project design was that participation in the inservice program would not only improve teachers' speaking and teaching abilities, but that it would also enable them to assume control for continuing work with these issues among their colleagues. In other words, they were learning process as well as product.

The total program consisted of four interrelated phases of which two occurred during the funding period and the other two as follow-up. Briefly, they were designed as:

*Phase 1: Proficiency Building.* A series of Saturday Immersion sessions was held throughout the academic year at several of the campuses of the State System of Higher Education in Pennsylvania. Teachers enjoyed an opportunity to talk with other teachers about topics geared to strengthen their target-language proficiency under the leadership of a native, or near native, college professor who had been trained in the conduct of the Oral Proficiency Interview. It was felt that this training made these professors



BEST COPY AVAILABLE

more aware of the different performance levels described in the ACTFL Guidelines and therefore best prepared to lead the kinds of sessions desired.

*Phase 2: Proficiency Training.* A three-week summer institute was held on the IUP campus. It had two components: The first week was subcontracted to ACTFL (American Council of the Teaching of Foreign Language) to train selected secondary teachers in the procedures for conducting and rating the Oral Proficiency Interview. This training workshop was followed by two weeks of intensive work with proficiency-oriented curriculum design and the instructional strategies appropriate for a more communicative language classroom.

*Phase 3: Proficiency Implementation.* During the summer workshop, teachers chose specific projects which would be the basis of experimentation and evaluation in their classes during the 1987/88 school year. Their district superintendents had committed to them a sum of $200.00 for the purchase of materials that they deemed useful for effective implementation of their project.

*Phase 4: Proficiency Results.* Evaluation and dissemination of the results of the workshop projects are taking place on informal and formal bases. Teachers were encouraged to share what they had learned with colleagues in their schools or regions or through activities in collaborative groups already active in many regions in the state. Many had reported that they have already found occasions for this. The Spring Methodology Conference at IUP in April 1988 will serve as a forum for presentations based upon the teachers' work.

## Proficiency Building and Proficiency Training

This article will explore the two completed phases of the project with an emphasis on the positive interactions teachers experienced as they strove to improve their own fluency, as they learned to conduct interviews and as they experimented with adapting materials and developing teaching strategies to promote proficiency within their classrooms.

### *The Immersion Sessions*

Immersion sessions were held at Lock Haven, Slippery Rock, and West Chester Universities of Pennsylvania as well as at IUP. The format of the Oral Proficiency Interview served as a guideline for the common structuring of the Saturday sessions. It was known that the teachers would demonstrate a wide range of proficiency levels among themselves, and activities were needed that would be at a comfortable level at least some of the time

and at a challenge level at others. It was important for teachers to use this opportunity to talk with colleagues as adults and to offset the predominant experience of most which was talking about texts to adolescents. At the same time, it was necessary for them to have to reach, to be pushed linguistically so that growth and improvement might also occur.

An additional advantage of adhering to the Oral Interview format lay in its power to direct the role of the group leader. It is not uncommon in these periodic immersion experiences or in advanced conversation courses, for native-speaker professors to do most of the talking; indeed, they often become listening rather than speaking occasions. Teachers do enjoy immersions where they are flooded with language and able to acquire new cultural information, but our goal was the improvement and/or maintenance of their oral skills so a preponderance of "teacher talk" (here teacher means student) was a criterion by which success would be measured. Training in the OPI includes mastering interview techniques which help the interviewer develop good samples with a much higher quantity of interviewee's speech. Question types which elicit more extensive responses, nonverbal encouragers, and nonobtrusive feedback are devices used effectively by trained interviewers. Consequently, professors were chosen to lead these immersion sessions who had been trained in the Interview, even though not all had followed through with certification as testers. Their experience through the training workshops rendered them ideal group leaders. They understood clearly the levels of proficiency which were keyed to the various activities and were able to design and lead practices that would elicit performance at those levels.

A framework designed by the project directors as a guide to the professors leading the groups was a constant in the sessions. The specific activities to carry out the objectives were designed by the individual faculty members.

1) *Warm-Up* (1-½ hours).
Targeted level of proficiency: *Intermediate*.

Just as in the Oral Interview, it was important to start with an activity to reacquaint teachers with the language, to acquaint them with colleagues they did not know, to put them at ease in an informal, casual setting where they could choose much of what they wanted to say in terms of information.

*Sample Activities:*

A) *Interviewing*: Participants interview two other people they had not met before. They are given a sheet

of paper with designated topics listed across the top such as: (FR) *Voyages / preferences / loisirs / impression* or (SP) *Familia / Enseñanza / Deportes / Algo extraño occurrido este mes*. There are blocks which provide space for note-taking under each topic. At the end of the give-and-take, participants introduce one another to the group by sharing some of the interesting information they had gathered.

B) *Story Telling*: Participants compose a story, in chain style, to accompany a series of pictures. The latter may be drawn from any text, workbook, or magazine. Participants themselves establish the level of the activity, for those who are stronger in the language tend to embellish or create more complex story lines. The fact that each contributes only a sentence or two keeps it comfortable for less fluent speakers.

2) *Discourse and Instructional Activities* (1½ hours)
Targeted level of proficiency: *Advanced*.

It was predicted that this would be the level at which most teachers operated most comfortably. It was intended to serve the Level Check function of the Oral Interview which meant giving participants opportunities to talk for extended sequences on a variety of familiar subjects and current events. Tasks of narration, description, giving instructions, dealing with complications in the target culture and talking about timely topics in a factual manner. Naturally, for weaker participants, this kind of activity pushed them linguistically while their colleagues played the role of sympathetic conversational partner.

*Sample Activities*

A) *Giving Instructions (Body poses)*. Participants worked in pairs for this activity designed by Fernand Fisel of the French Department at IUP. One person in each pair was given a card with a stick figure drawing of a person in a curous body pose. The person with the card may not reveal it to his/her partner but must instruct him/her to pose in the

same manner. No gestures were permitted; everything had to be done with words. The exercise was completed when the matching position was achieved. (Needless to say, we had suggested that participants dress casually and comfortably for the Saturday program!) The whole group then came together and the "poseur" assumed his/her position so that the others could give it a name as is done with sculpture *a la "Le Penseur."*

B) *Slide Interpretation.* Vincent Remillard, Chairperson of the Foreign Language Department at St. Francis College (Loretto, PA) used slides to combine a cultural presentation with tasks requiring detailed description. The first group of slides were of scenery and participants were asked to describe what they saw, guess where it was, and provide rationales for their choice. Then slides were shown which contained more clues to location and events. Follow-up activities included stories and personal narrations by teachers who had visited or lived in the region shown and questions from those who wanted more information.

C) *News Broadcasts.* Working in groups of three, participants prepare the evening news. Members in each group volunteer to report the local and international news, sports, weather, while others serve as field reporters, interviewers, and announcers for commercials.

3) *Challenge activities* (1 hour)
Targeted level of proficiency: *Superior*

After a relaxing luncheon where conversation was maintained in the target languages, teachers returned to activities which challenged many while serving as good opportunities for the strongest speakers to use their skills at a level not often available to them in their daily contacts while teaching. The activities required them to talk on topics less familiar to them, support opinions, hypothesize and deal with abstract issues. Tailoring of language was also required in some of the

roles that they had to assume. Those participants not yet at this level benefited from the effort and from the listening comprehension that was provided for them by their colleagues.

*Sample activities.*

A) *Team Analysis for Advertising Campaign.* This activity, also designed by Remillard, was based upon an idea of Carney (1985). The group is divided into teams of 2 to 4 persons. Each is given an advertisement in the target language for the purpose of a publicity campaign. Within each group, someone is appointed team leader, head of advertising, and sales manager, with other sales personnel added as needed. The teams discuss the target and psychology of the ad as well as how it could be rendered more effective. The entire group comes together to discuss how each ad reflects the target culture and the possible success of the ad in the U.S.

B) *Mock Interviews of Political Figures.* Teachers worked in groups with a leader selected to play the role of a prominent political figure from the target culture. Participants question the politician about his/her views, future political actions, and hypothetical situations. Following the interview segment, the group discusses the responses given in terms of current events, political ramifications and their own opinions of the situation.

C) *Current Events Discussion.* Participants read a brief newspaper or magazine article or listen to a taped report (or videotaped from satellite) in the target language dealing with a current event. Afterwards they devise a "pro" or "con" issue based on the report, form teams and debate the issues.

4) *Wind-Down* (1 hour)

Targeted Level of Proficiency: *Intermediate/Advanced*

The goal here was to bring the day to a close with some enjoyable exercises which allowed people to operate at their individual levels of proficiency. The most

suitable activities for this period were those that permitted stronger candidates to be more expansive and creative and weaker ones to participate fully but at a linguistically less sophisticated level.

*Sample Activities.*

A) *Desert Island, What If . . . ?"* Working in small groups, participants pretend that they have been washed ashore on a small deserted island where there is not much to do. They must think of ten things they would have brought to the island had they known this would occur and explain why they chose these objects. An optional, additional task would require the group to reach consensus on the ten items.

B) *Situations.* Any type of role play can serve as an informal wind down. Some examples used:
   – Explain to your foreign friend how your food processor works, why you like it (or not), and what you use it for. Share a recipe.
   – Explain to your Mayan exchange student, who has always slept in a hammock, how to make her bed in your home.

*Teacher reactions to the immersion sessions.* Evaluations were done at the end of each immersion Saturday and a sample of responses included:

– "the best thing was the people and their good will towards the common object of their presence, talking in the language"
– "the use of French all day"; "the use of Spanish exclusively"
– "ideas which can be used in my classroom"
– "discussion of relevant issues"
– "opportunities to speak with colleagues from different schools in both language."

Timothy Ashe, a Spanish teacher at Kittanning High School (PA), reported on how the immersion experience affected him and his teaching (1987 ACTFL Annual Meeting, Atlanta, GA). The language opportunity was important in that it refreshed him and reminded him of a level of language he once used more frequently, still has to use when he travels or hosts exchange students, but does not often have to sustain in his daily teaching.

He found it challenging and rewarding to have to speak more than "Spanish II or III." Ashe has designed a variety of activities for his classes based upon exercises in which he participated but adjusted for the age and language level of his students.

The project directors were especially pleased by the readiness and willingness of teachers to participate in the many activities and by comments which demonstrated that the experience made them more eager and willing to pursue small group work in their classes and include activities which allow students to work at a challenge level – even though errors may occur. It is hoped that the stimulus received from working together and the opportunity to see how much sessions could be structured by teachers themselves to help one another would result in continued immersions as part of collaboratives and inservice programs.

*The Summer Institute*

The Summer Institute on Proficiency Testing and Teaching consisted of a three-week program; during the first week, participants were trained by ACTFL in the administration and rating of the Oral Proficiency Interview. This was one of the few occasions where tester training was offered to an audience of secondary teachers. The remaining weeks were devoted to a curriculum workshop which dealt with objectives, strategies, and materials adaptation for a proficiency-oriented classroom. The pairing of training plus curricular implications assured that teachers' grasp of the issues was based on a thorough understanding and initiation into the details of the proficiency scales as demonstrated by student performance.

*The ACTFL Workshop*

Our goal was to select teachers for the Institute who were at the Superior level of proficiency so that they might pursue certification as a tester. In actuality, we accepted some who will probably test at the Advanced/ Advanced Plus level. Although they will not be certified, it was important to note that these individuals did master the art of eliciting ratable samples at the lower levels, and they transferred the insights gained into effective curricular changes.

Teacher cooperation in this initial session was superb. As anyone knows who has undergone this training workshop, there is an intensity and a pressure exerted by learning a new technique, in what is often another language, among one's peers. It is quite different from taking a course together, for performance in a formative stage is no easy task for people used to being teachers, not learners. They helped one another with constructive criticism

of interviewing strategies, with preparation of questions and situations for different levels and by listening to and analyzing master tapes. The dormitories in the evening were even filled with the sounds of teachers interviewing one another within and across their language groups.

*The Curriculum Workshop*

The workshop consisted of a number of topical presentations by the directors and by outside consultants. While the intent here is to focus on the teachers' interactions with one another as they defined a project for implementation in their classrooms, a brief report upon the topics and sequence of the sessions establishes coverage.

The overriding goal was to have teachers incorporate principles of proficiency guidelines into their classes and to determine what changes will occur as a result of paying attention to concepts such as "creative language," communicative activities, personalization, task/function of language, and the functional trisection as an organizer.

1) *Objectives and goal setting*. Floy Miller and Charlotte Cole, secondary teachers from Massachusetts, led sessions on curriculum development from a proficiency perspective.
2) *Speaking*. A major portion of the work revolved about developing oral proficiency through systematic attention to the level requirements. Ways of adapting interview procedures, role-plays, and survival language for use in courses were explored; for advanced students, thought was given to finding opportunities for paragraph length speech and extended discourse.
3) *Receptive skills, listening and reading*. Total Physical Response was presented as a method for developing listening skills early in a program; some work was also done with the Natural Approach to language learning. The use of authentic materials for both listening and reading was explored and teachers practiced working with those materials to make them accessible to students.
4) *Writing*. Comparisons with speaking led participants through some new ways of developing writing according to functional tasks. Journal writing and methods for error correction and feedback were investigated.
5) *Miscellaneous issues*. Communicative language teaching

requires that practitioners become competent in managing:

- small groups and paired work
- grading exercises with divergent responses
- error correction (and other feedback measures)
- achievement and/or communicative testing
- textbook adaptation.

A fair amount of "hands-on" time was built into the workshop, and the fact that most participants were living in the dormitory meant that much unofficial collaboration also took place. Periodically teachers worked in groups based upon common textbooks in their schools; at other times, they grouped themselves to solve problems with certain levels, especially upper ones where they expressed frustration over a lack of materials to fit the kinds of advanced level tasks they now wanted to emphasize. They shared activities that worked for them. (It is important to note that not everything has to be new or changed. Teachers have been using a lot of good communicative strategies for years, but still benefit from having their contribution confirmed.) They also discovered that the objectives they were setting for the various levels were fairly consistent although they came from quite different schools and districts. Finally, they found that their challenges had common dimensions, and they had created a network among themselves which would allow them to continue to grow and to collaborate.

The impact of the Summer Institute did not end with the summer itself. As the workshop went into its final days, teachers began to concentrate on selecting some aspect of their teaching that they wanted to develop into a follow-up project. The final projects tended to group themselves into the following categories:

- Speaking activities
- Developing advanced level skills
- Survival skills component
- Vocabulary and personalization
- Reading strategies and materials
- Culture
- Listening comprehension materials
- Oral testing
- Writing at the advanced level

In their evaluations, participants confirmed that the combination of interactions with institute personnel and with colleagues provided for a rewarding experience that was certain to influence their teaching. The year ahead should provide evidence of what does indeed occur in at least thirty-six classrooms, primarily in Pennsylvania.

## Conclusion

The design of the project assumed that with a chance to participate in immersion sessions, teachers could move on to take responsibility for maintenance and advancement of their proficiency. They now know how to lead groups so that immersion time is not spent in happenstance or passive activities, and how to challenge their language ability by being aware of what tasks and content the next level involves. There is a possibility for a growing network of trained and certified OPI testers in the area which should allow for exchange interviews of students and related activities. The summer curricular discussion united teachers from school around the state and from within districts so that they could evaluate their own programs in light of others, share information about texts and materials, and cooperate in the setting of priorities for their students. If the final outcome is achieved then teachers will have talked with one another so that they have grown linguistically and pedagogically with the ultimate goal that of conducting inservice projects themselves to spread their new expertise among colleagues.

## Bibliography

Carney, William. "Team Analysis of Advertising for the Commercial French Course." *French for Business and International Trade*, David O'Connell, ed. University of Illinois at Chicago, 1985.